

What is cholesterol?

Cholesterol is a fatty substance found in the body. Your liver manufactures about 80% of it and you get the other 20% from food sources. Cholesterol is found exclusively in animal products, such as meat, eggs, and dairy products. Plant products contain no cholesterol.

What should your numbers be? (cholesterol levels are reported as mg/dl)

Ideally, your **total cholesterol** should be **less than 200**.

- **HDL** or good cholesterol should be **greater than 40 - higher is better**. A level of 60 or higher is very good.
- **LDL** or bad cholesterol should be **less than 100**. Levels of 160 or higher can greatly increase your risk for heart disease.

Who should have their cholesterol checked?

Adults over the age of 20 should have their cholesterol checked at least once every five years. People with family history of high cholesterol or coronary heart disease before age 55, diabetics, smokers, and those with high blood pressure should be checked on a regular basis.

What can you do to lower your cholesterol?

The best way to reduce your blood cholesterol level is to choose foods that are low in total fat and low in saturated fat in particular. Read labels! Avoid foods that get more than 30% of their calories from fat. Choose fruits and vegetables, whole grains and legumes which are high in fiber. Lean meats, poultry and fish are good selections.

Develop an exercise routine. Being physically active can raise your good cholesterol (HDL) and lower the bad (LDL). It also improves your blood



pressure, strengthens your heart and reduces stress. Regular exercise is a major component for weight loss which will also lower your cholesterol. If you are overweight or have existing health problems, check with your doctor, before starting an exercise program. Be sure to increase activity gradually and set realistic goals.

If you smoke, find a way to stop! Make it a gift to yourself and your family.

References: Step by Step: Eating to Lower Your High Blood Cholesterol from the American Heart Association and the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute. NIH publication No. 94-2920, and www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=183

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